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ABSTRACT

This paper describes research leading to the development and evaluation of techniques for effectively interviewing children who are witnesses to or victims of crime. The techniques were developed from basic theoretical principles of memory recall that were modified to accommodate the capabilities and limitations of children. The first experiment staged an event that resembled the type of crime that children testify about. The event was witnessed by pairs of children who were either 7-8 or 10-11 years old. One child in each pair participated in the scenario as victim, while the other child witnessed the event. Two days later, each child was questioned about the event by one of nine Sheriff's Deputies who were skilled in interviewing children. Each deputy used either cognitive questioning procedures or their own, "standard" methods. Findings indicated that questioning techniques of memory guidance based on principles of cognitive psychology significantly increased the number of facts recalled at each age level without affecting the number of incorrect items generated. The second experiment evaluated the usefulness of a practice cognitive interview about an innocuous staged event that took place prior to interviews about the event targeted for investigation. Both cognitive interviewing and practice with the technique increased the number of correct items recalled. (RH)

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COGNITIVE INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES FOR USE WITH CHILDREN AS VICTIMS AND WITNESSES OF CRIME

Eyewitness testimony is known to be incomplete, sometimes inaccurate, and often malleable from inappropriate questioning procedures (Loftus, 1979). Nevertheless, both investigative and judicial procedures rely heavily on information gained from witnesses (Rand Corporation, 1975). Furthermore, the recollections of young children often are even more incomplete than those of older children and adults (King & Yuille, 1987). This is an important consideration because an increasing number of children have been asked to testify about events, especially about events in which they were alleged to be victims (Ceci, Ross, & Toglia, 1987).

This paper describes research leading to the development and evaluation of techniques for effectively interviewing children. The techniques were developed from basic, theoretical principles of memory recall (Geiselman, Fisher, MacKinnon, & Holland, 1985) that were modified to accommodate the capabilities and limitations of children (Geiselman & Padilla, 1988). These techniques are suitable for use with alleged victims or witnesses in pre-trial interviews, preliminary hearings, civil depositions, and for trials.

In Experiment 1, a staged event was carried out that resembled in many respects, the type of crime that children testify about in court (Rudy & Goodman, 1989). The incident involved a private encounter between an unfamiliar adult male and

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two children. The children in each pair were either 7-to-8 years old or 10-to-11 years old; and one child in each pair actively participated in the scenario (the "victim") while the other child watched the scenario (the "witness"). Two days later, each child was questioned about the staged event by one of nine Los Angeles Sheriff's Deputies who were skilled in interviewing children. Each Deputy used either "cognitive" questioning procedures or their own, "standard" methods. Each interview was tape-recorded, and was analyzed along both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

The results showed that the questioning techniques based on principles from cognitive psychology significantly increased the number of correct facts recalled at each age level without affecting the number of incorrect items generated (see Table 1). Thus, the assumption was validated that recollections of child witnesses can be enhanced reliably with memory guidance procedures.

The older children recalled significantly more correct facts and generated significantly fewer errors than the younger children; but the children from both age groups showed remarkably high levels of recall accuracy (90% to 95% correct). The role that a child played in the staged event did not affect the number of correct facts recalled; but the children who participated as participants (victims) made significantly fewer errors than the children who were observers (witnesses) to the event.

Experiment 2 was conducted to evaluate the usefulness of a

"practice" cognitive interview with children about an innocuous staged event prior to their being interviewed about the event targeted for investigation. Forty-eight hours later, third and sixth graders were interviewed by Sheriff's Deputies about a staged event, after receiving practice with the cognitive techniques or rapport development only. Both cognitive interviewing and practice with cognitive interviewing increased the number of correct items recalled without an increase in errors; but these effects were more pronounced with the sixth graders (see Table 2). Effects of interviewer style (ambivalent, condescending, or positive) on performance by children also were assessed.

Based on several quantitative and qualitative analyses of the interviews, guidelines were developed for different phases of the interview process including rapport development, interview preparation instructions, narrative (open ended) report, specific (directed) questions, and concluding exchanges. Training programs for the dissemination of knowledge pertaining to these guidelines should prove useful for those who are faced with the task of questioning children about witnessed or experienced events.

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TABLE 1

Quantitative Performance Results as a Function of Grade, Child's Role, and Type of Interview Procedure

Grade	Second				Fifth			
Role =	Witness		Victim		Witness		Victim	
Interview =>	Cg.	St.	Cg.	St.	Cg.	St.	Cg.	St.
n =>	6	4	5	5	6	4	4	6
Number Correct	38.60	25.00	37.75	31.00	56.00	39.40	41.83	43.00
Number Incorrect	4.20	5.75	2.25	3.00	2.00	2.60	1.50	2.50
Accuracy Rate	.90	.81	.94	.91	.97	.94	.97	.95
Number of Questions	63.50	91.20	58.75	77.33	47.00	71.80	56.67	99.50
Total Time	28.40	16.00	25.75	27.50	29.00	20.60	25.50	26.00
Rapport Exchanges	18.20	9.25	14.50	27.00	2.00	15.40	6.00	10.50

Note. Cg = Cognitive, St = Standard.

TABLE 2

Performance in Sheriffs' Interviews as a Function of Interview Format Condition and Grade of Child Witness

Performance Variable	Interview Format Condition					
	CC		RC		RS	
Grade =>	3rd	6th	3rd	6th	3rd	6th
n =>	11	20	11	19	12	19
Number Correct Items	38.64	64.00	32.00	48.00	26.83	38.53
Number Incorrect Items	6.09	6.20	5.18	5.00	6.58	5.79
Accuracy Rate	.86	.91	.86	.91	.80	.87
Total Questions Asked	75.55	71.00	76.45	65.52	63.42	72.47
Length of Questioning Phase (min)	21.54	22.55	13.55	18.26	19.00	25.53
Total Rapport Exchanges	17.10	16.00	16.82	8.69	19.67	4.69
Number of Inappropriate Exchanges	5.86	1.67	4.17	2.50	4.00	1.00

Note. "C"=full cognitive, "S"=full standard, "R"=rapport only.